

INFO	LOG-00	EEB-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00
	DOEE-00	DS-00	DHSE-00	EUR-00	VCI-00	H-00	TEDE-00
	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	CAC-00	MOFM-00	MOF-00
	VCIE-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-00	NIMA-00	PA-00	MCC-00
	GIWI-00	PRS-00	P-00	DOHS-00	FMPC-00	SP-00	SSO-00
	SS-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	NCTC-00	SCRS-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00
	DRL-00	G-00	CARC-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	FA-00	SWCI-00
	PESU-00	SANA-00	/001W				

R 121600Z AUG 09  
 FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA  
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1651  
 INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM  
 AMEMBASSY KAMPALA  
 AMEMBASSY KIGALI  
 AMEMBASSY KINSHASA  
 AMEMBASSY LONDON  
 AMEMBASSY LUSAKA  
 AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
 AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 000394

LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS, NAIROBI FOR SLUTZ

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/12/2019  
 TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [BY](#)  
 SUBJECT: MSD LEADER SINDUHIJE REQUESTS "TEMPORARY ASYLUM"

REF: BUJUMBURA 347 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Classified by CDA C. Twining for reasons 1.4(b) and 1.4(d)

11. (C) Summary: Aspiring Presidential candidate Alexis Sinduhije called on DCM at her residence August 11 to request that he be allowed to stay in US embassy housing for a few days to avoid anticipated political harassment. As there was no life threatening situation, DCM listened to him and persuaded him to go home. End summary.

12. (C) Alexis Sinduhije, leader of the relatively minor political party Movement for Solidarity and Democracy (MSD) and a man clearly running for the Presidency next year, asked to see DCM the night of August 11. He reported that he had received a summons to go to the Prosecutor's Office the following day to explain allegations that Burundian intelligence was plotting to hire Tutsi youth to kill Hutu civilians in an attempt to cast blame on Sinduhije and his party. He claimed that he had information from "internal discussions" in the Prosecutor's Office that when he appeared in response to the summons, he would be arrested, tortured, and detained throughout the crucial months of the Presidential campaign. Sinduhije asserted that the GOB planned to persecute him in order to "humiliate" Human Rights Watch and various European countries that had supported him during his previous detentions, to show these foreign entities that they did not rule Burundi.

13. (C) Sinduhije said that he did not intend to respond personally to the summons, but would send MSD party representatives in his stead. He expected that the police would seek to arrest him when he failed to appear and asked for a few days of "temporary asylum" in a house belonging to the US Embassy, since he said the Americans were seen as more neutral than the Europeans. Sinduhije said that he would only stay for a few days, until he could appear at an MSD rally, where, surrounded by thousands of supporters, he would presumably be less vulnerable to arrest.

14. (C) DCM declined Sinduhije's suggestion of temporary asylum. She observed that it was a top US policy goal to facilitate free and fair elections in 2010 and also to uphold the rights of all candidates to campaign freely and without harassment. This policy could be undermined, however, if we were perceived to be giving preferential treatment to any one candidate. She questioned as well if any diplomatic mission

could provide temporary asylum for a candidate who continued to campaign actively, since the mission would inevitably be seen as sponsoring that candidate and meddling in the election. The DCM commented that the campaign was long, and if this week's crisis with the Prosecutor were somehow resolved satisfactorily, next week or month would likely bring a new crisis affecting Sinduhije or another candidate. She doubted that temporary asylum for political candidates would provide a solution, and urged Sinduhije to contemplate other means to bring about the common goal of building a free and fair electoral process in Burundi. The DCM also asked Sinduhije if he thought that his standing with Burundian voters would be undermined if he were perceived to be relying on foreign diplomats to sponsor his campaign or protect him from due process of the law. Sinduhije replied that he did not think it would be a problem with his supporters.

¶5. (C) During more than an hour of discussion, Sinduhije took these observations on board. He did not appear to be unduly nervous or upset, but he was clearly working his extensive personal network via cellphone. At 11:00 p.m., he departed the DCM's residence in a personal automobile, accompanied by a driver and two plainclothes men who appeared to be acting as bodyguards. Throughout the encounter, Sinduhije was polite and personable.

¶6. (SBU) The next morning, Sinduhije responded personally to the summons, surrounded by hundreds of his supporters who waited for him outside of the Prosecutor's Office. (RSO surveillance detection estimated crowd size.) Sinduhije was neither arrested nor tortured; rather, he emerged a few hours later to deliver a press conference to his cheering supporters, after which he went home. We will report on further developments as they occur.

¶7. (C) Comment: It is a rough sport to engage in Burundian party politics, and we expect it to get rougher as the political campaign progresses. It is not inconceivable that at some time during the campaign, we might again be asked to provide shelter to a political candidate who believes he faces a credible threat of imminent danger, though we would not consider any such request unless it was truly a matter of life or death. At that point, the large UN operation here would be more appropriate to deal with the matter. Sinduhije's request of August 11 clearly fell far short of that standard. Rather, it appeared that he sought to draw the US Embassy into his personal political narrative of heroic resistance to Burundian government persecution. We can expect that he will try again.

¶8. (C) Comment continued: We are concerned that several of our interlocutors have told us that Sinduhije is spreading the word that he is "America's candidate." In all of our public and private discussion, US Embassy personnel will continue to say we support a fair electoral process in Burundi, but that we do not have a preferred candidate. We will continue to take scrupulous care to ensure that none of our words or actions can be interpreted as political bias or meddling in the elections.

Twining